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SUBJECT: EAST JAVA MUDFLOW UPDATE: US TECHNICAL ADVISOR BEGINS WORK
IN SURABAYA

REF: SURABAYA 132

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accordingly.

11. (SBU) Summary: US Technical Advisor for the Sidoarjo Mudflow, Dr. Van Williams arrived in Surabaya on December 18 following a November survey of the mudflow site, and discussions with the Sidoarjo Mud Management Agency (BPLS), the Center of Volcanology and Disaster Mitigation and the Department of Energy and Mineral Resources (reftel). Dr. Williams is a Scientist Emeritus of the US Geologic Survey (USGS) and will be based at the Consulate General Surabaya and the Sidoarjo Mud Management Agency during his initial six month contract. Indonesian officials expressed appreciation for the advisor and his anticipated contribution in developing a strategy to mitigate the effect of the mudflow. End Summary

12. (U) Between October 31 and November 11, Dr. Williams, fellow USGS Scientist Emeritus Dr. Tom Casadevall, and Dr. Michael Sharp of the US Army Corps of Engineers visited the mudflow site and attended a series of meetings with the Sidoarjo Mud Management Agency (BPLS). This visit was part of the US Mission's effort to assist Indonesian authorities with mudflow mitigation. Key goals of the visit were to assess current conditions on site and further define the role of the US technical advisor working with BPLS and the Ministry of Public Works. The US scientists also attended meetings with the Ministry of Energy and Mineral Resources (reftel), and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Jakarta. In Bandung, they visited the Center of Volcanology and Geological Disaster Mitigation.

Conditions on Site

13. (SBU) The team's visit to the mudflow was the second for Dr. Casadevall, and his experience allowed him to evaluate BPLS's

progress. The team arrived onsite just at the beginning of the rainy season, and they were able to observe efforts to increase the flow of mud out to sea following the dry season and its low river levels. The visit also coincided with news that money for mitigation at the epicenter has been cut by up to 75%, (reftel).

A subsequent dike breach on November 18 has proven the concerns of BPLS geologists, that stalled funds are endangering the containment system at its most vulnerable time--the onset of the rainy season.

¶4. (U) As of December 18, compensation has been paid to a majority of victims identified in a Presidential Decree. However financial troubles experienced by the holding company responsible for making the payments have cast doubt on the viability of the compensation scheme (reftel). Current heavy rains have reduced silting in the Porong River used by BPLS to move mud out to sea. On December 17, BPLS announced plans to expand mud storage capacity by 30 million cubic meters. A new dike wall eleven meters high will enclose 30 square hectares in Besuki Village and is scheduled for completion in April 2009. BPLS also plans to create 70 square hectares of mud holding-ponds in Renokenongo Village. Villagers oppose the plan and regularly demonstrate near the worksite because many residents have yet to receive final compensation payments.

GOI Expressed Appreciation for US Technical Advisor

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¶5. (SBU) During a November 10 meeting with Secretary General of Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Imron Cotan, Dr. Casadevall described current conditions at the mudflow site and his positive impression of BPLS operations in handling them given the enormity of the job. Dr. Casadevall also explained the role of the US technical advisor to the mudflow. Secretary General Cotan expressed his appreciation to the United States for its efforts. He also noted that while the Ministry of Foreign Affairs does not have a formal role in the cooperation, it is proof of a good working relationship between the two countries and should be widely publicized.

¶6. (SBU) The team provided their Indonesian hosts with a USGS report on the chemistry of the mud based on a sample provided to Dr. Casadevall during his September 2007 visit. According to Dr. Casadevall, there is no increased health risk due to the chemical contents of the mud; however the size of the mud particles could be detrimental to human health if inhaled as dust. The current visit established several key areas for fruitful US-Indonesian cooperation at the site to include assistance with assessing the capacity of the river to continue to carry mud out to sea. BPLS Head Mr. Sunarso and Minister Purnomo Yusgiantoro expressed appreciation and support for the work of the advisor.

MCCLELLAND